

2,000 Campus Protesters for Gaza Have Been Arrested. Momentum's Only Building.

Students nationwide face harsh repression from university administrators and the police, but they're not backing down.

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At the University of Florida encampment for Gaza, student protesters are forcing themselves to keep their eyes open night after night, fearing that if they doze off, they could be arrested.

"We are not allowed to sleep," University of Florida freshman Cameron Driggers told *Truthout* having spent multiple nights at the encampment. "We've literally had folks, at least a dozen each night, camping out there, just sitting there throughout the night to maintain the encampment."

Protesters are forbidden from sleeping or having pillows, tents or sleeping bags, according to a [University of Florida memo](#). Signs must be held at all times. While some of the rules are open to interpretation — such as the prohibition against "disruption" — the punishment for disobeying any of the rules is quite clear: Students face the risk of being suspended and banned from campus for three years. Employees will be fired. (Although Gov. Ron DeSantis [signed legislation](#) in March criminalizing sleeping or camping on public property, it has not yet gone into effect.)

"We are under constant surveillance by the police," said Driggers. "The police will be like, 'Oh, that looks like you're sleeping, you know the consequences for that.'"

On Sunday night, Driggers texted *Truthout* a video of police officers removing chairs that he said protesters had set out for demonstrators with disabilities. The next day, law enforcement [arrested nine protesters](#), six of whom were students. The protesters were

[charged](#) with a variety of offenses, including [wearing a mask or hood in public](#), according to news reports.

When approached for comment by *Truthout*, a University of Florida spokesperson provided a statement stating that those arrested “knew the rules, they broke the rules, and they’ll face the consequences.”

And those consequences are severe, especially for low-income students. They risk arrest, suspension and [eviction](#), and more. The six arrested students, for instance, have been banned from all University of Florida properties, according to the university.

Repressive crackdowns on student protesters are happening across the United States, not just in Republican-led states like Florida but also in “blue states” like New York and California.

According to a new [Associated Press tally released today](#), more than 2,000 people at 36 different schools have now been arrested nationwide since April 18 in conjunction with college and university-based protests against Israel’s war on Gaza.

At the City College of New York, where [thousands of students](#) experience food insecurity, administrators [closed the school’s food pantry](#), blaming the student protests. On Tuesday night, police stormed [City College](#) and Columbia University, and [arrested hundreds](#) of students.

Students are [battling on multiple fronts](#), confronting their universities’ [ties to companies that supply weapons to the Israeli apartheid regime](#), facing college [administrators’ repressive tactics](#), and pushing back against elected officials from [both parties](#) who [smear](#) them as antisemitic.

But activists across the country, from [Cal Poly Humboldt](#) to [Rutgers University](#), have remained steadfast in their demands for their universities to [sever all ties to Israel](#) and its weapons suppliers, to [disclose their investment portfolios, and divest from companies](#) that support the Israeli occupation.

Even as the tally of campus arrests surpasses 2,000, it’s still easy for journalists to give short shrift to *why* these protests are occurring in the first place, especially considering the U.S. mainstream [media’s consistently pro-Israel](#) coverage. News outlets like *The New York Times* have routinely [employed the passive voice](#) when recounting Israel’s crimes and have worked to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism in the American consciousness.

Israel [is committing](#) genocide. With [U.S. tax dollars](#), with [President Joe Biden’s blessing](#), with weapons from [American companies](#), and with the [complicity of countless U.S. universities](#), Israel has killed [tens of thousands](#) of Palestinians.

Israel has [kidnapped, tortured and starved](#) Palestinians. It has [executed](#) hundreds of Palestinians who were found in mass graves on hospital grounds. Some were [in surgical gowns](#). Israel’s blockade has forced [doctors to perform amputations](#) on children and [cesarean sections](#) on pregnant people without anesthesia. It has [deprived type 1 diabetics](#) of insulin.

The Israeli military has murdered Palestinian [journalists](#), [educators](#) and [doctors](#). It has

attacked Gaza's [universities](#), [refugee camps](#) and [hospitals](#). It has killed [more than 14,000 children](#).

This is what students are protesting.

It should be no surprise that universities have become the epicenter of the Free Palestine movement. Unlike anti-Zionist students, [corporations](#) that feed Israel's occupation have long been welcome on college campuses.

In February, Howard University activists [demanded](#) that their school ban the weapons manufacturers Boeing and [Lockheed Martin](#), in addition to several other corporations and the U.S. State Department, from participating in the university's career fairs.

In [a letter](#) published in the student newspaper, the Howard University activists explained that "as students striving to uphold principles of justice, equity and human rights," they felt compelled to address the "immense civilian suffering, dispossession, and massive and systematic human rights violations of Palestinians being perpetrated by Israel."

The letter continues: "We recognize that the devastation unfolding is further exacerbated by companies that finance, provide technological capabilities and profit from the one-sided war in Gaza, many of which have been invited to participate in our career fairs."

Israel has used Boeing's bombs and munitions to [perpetrate many atrocities](#), including its bombings of Palestinian homes and the Jabalia refugee camp, according to an investigation by the American Friends Service Committee. Last month, in response to student protests, Portland State University [agreed to "pause"](#) accepting donations from Boeing.

On Wednesday, May 1, students at the University of Alabama [held a demonstration to demand their school](#) no longer allow Lockheed Martin to recruit on campus and rename Hewson Hall, which is [named after](#) former Lockheed Martin CEO Marillyn Hewson and her husband, who have donated millions of dollars to the university.

The school [also hosts](#) the Marillyn A. Hewson Data Analytics Lab, which offers students the opportunity to "get exposed to leading industry partners such as Lockheed Martin," among others, according to the lab's website.

"As students of the University of Alabama, we can no longer stand by in silent complicity as our institution funds a state-sponsored massacre of Palestinians," the [organizers](#) said in a statement.

On Lockheed Martin's website, the company touts its [multibillion-dollar business dealings with Israel](#), including its work "strengthening IDF ground forces."

"Lockheed Martin has also supplied radars, rockets, fire control and guidance systems, laser pointers and pods, while also lending support to training, air traffic control and weather forecasting, to name but a few of our diverse activities," the website states.

The corporation's death count is not listed.

At the University of Florida, students have been protesting their school's partnership with [another war profiteer](#), the RTX Corporation, formerly Raytheon Technologies. Shortly after the October 7 attack, the company's CEO Greg Hayes acknowledged [during an earnings](#)

[call](#) and on an [appearance on CNBC](#) that Israel's assault on Gaza would benefit his company's bottom line.

But the University of Florida administration apparently hasn't let RTX's catalog of atrocities intrude on their [collaborations](#). The company is [one of the sponsors](#) for a [two-semester undergraduate course](#), according to the school's website. Last year, the University of Florida was also one of more than 70 schools that [participated](#) in Lockheed Martin's (unironically named) ["Ethics in Engineering" competition](#).

University of Florida student Driggers, who said he is a first-generation college student on scholarship, says he has a lot to lose if he's banned from campus. But he can't turn his back on Palestinians' fight for liberation.

"We have an obligation to obstruct and protest as much as possible," he said. "I know that history will vindicate us, as it has nearly every student social movement in history, and I can live with that. I need to be able to tell my kids and family in the future that I tried to do something about this, regardless of what the consequences were."

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Featured image: Scenes of the reinstated Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Columbia University on its fourth day. (Licensed under CC0)

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